

challenger

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Honors Society

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What If Shakespeare's Sister Had Written King Lear?

Honors Literature 224 — Women in Literature

The 10 women and two men enrolled in this class are sprawled in a circle on the floor in one of the side rooms off the cafeteria. Normally, they would meet in a more comfortable bay on the side of the cafeteria, but they have been chased out by a sports banquet. The sounds of speeches and music filter into the room, but the class is involved in the discus-

sion of Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* and how it relates to and illuminates *King Lear*.

A Thousand Acres parallels the characters and plot of *King Lear*. "She makes some pretty remarkable connections," Professor Nancy

Davis notes. "The perspective of this book is a wonderful way to get a better understanding of *King*

Lear, which is a difficult play. It is certainly enhanced when you couple the books."

The class watches a video of the first scene of *King Lear* and traces the connections in Smiley's 1991 novel. *A Thousand Acres* is told not from the point of view of the Lear or Cordelia characters, but emphasizes the characters of the two wicked sisters.

"Why give these unlikable characters a voice?" asks Davis.

"It shows the other side," says Tim Davis. "Sheds some light on their motivation. The women in *Lear* don't really have a say. There's a female perspective in the re-write."

"Maybe there is another side to the story," agrees the instructor. "The sisters in *A Thousand Acres* are not stock charac-

ters like Shakespeare's sisters. Here we have two women who don't hate each other; isn't that different?"

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"Let me imagine, since facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister."

—Virginia Woolf

Women, continued on page 6

Two *Different* Skills

Recently I discussed the concepts of denotation and connotation with my English 101 class, trying to build on knowledge that the students already possess but haven't organized in a way that allows them to make full use of their understanding to communicate more precisely and write more effectively.

We discussed the differences in nuance among various terms for weighing more than average:

- fat—no one liked it; too blunt, although a fat paycheck is good
- overweight—some might accept it, but no one treasured it because it implies excessiveness
- plump—okay for chicken maybe, but not for people; even “pleasantly plump” seemed a little condescending and men especially found it offensive for themselves
- obese—very medical sounding, with a tone of unhealthiness
- chunky—maybe okay for little boys
- chubby—maybe okay for little girls; interesting speculation on why the difference between genders
- stout—okay for men
- portly—archaic sounding and worse than stout somehow, particularly unpleasant and unsuitable applied to women
- heavy—maybe okay for men, but some negative connotations even there
- husky—maybe okay for boys and men through their twenties

Then we compared words to signify weighing less than average

and found, ironically, that most of them were also negative:

- slim—just about the favorite, though a slim majority or slim evidence could be bad
- thin—a proximately a tie with slim for acceptability but in spite of our current dieting craze students cited many usages where this was bad, starting with thin development in an essay
- skinny—sounds sexually unattractive
- slender—maybe okay for women, but definitely not a compliment to a man
- scrawny—particularly insulting to males because of its suggestion of weakness
- reedy—almost never used for a woman and again unpleasant for its implication of powerlessness
- wiry—better for men than for women, its hint of tensile strength seemed unfeminine
- underweight—even more derogatory than overweight, implies a medical condition that is probably as unhealthy as obesity
- svelte—exotic, only a few students knew what it meant but those who did agreed that it would be okay for a woman, especially a fashion model, while insulting for a man

After considering the negative connotations of the majority of words to describe the two concepts, the class speculated that deviating from the norm in weight, whether up or down, seems to generally lose

prestige, and that Americans might not be as tolerant of differences as we'd like to believe we are.

This discussion led me to think about some other words which have similar denotative meanings but

FROM THE DESK OF DR. HULL

significant connotative differences, namely the various synonyms for “talk,” which merely suggests a speaker, who may or may not be alone.

- monologue—one speaker; this is probably undesirable if there are two or more people present, suggests boring others and hogging the stage
- dialogue—two speakers; again theatrical overtones
- speak—can be pretty formal; as in an after-dinner speaker who is expected to entertain
- lecture—very formal speaking; very negative unless the lecturer is a recognized authority
- conversation—definitely requires two or more people; sounds relaxed and rather aimless
- chat—an even more informal conversation
- discussion and debate—both signify a fairly focused interchange of ideas between or among people

The last two terms interest me because they signify differing attitudes. In a discussion, folks state their opinions on a subject and listen to others' ideas. Presumably all discussers begin by having thought about a subject, but they may not

Help Wanted!

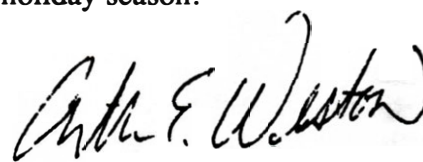
The Honors Society is in need of a Public Relations Officer. April Lapointe resigned two weeks ago and we need to fill her position. Anyone interested should show up at the meeting following this publication. The club meets every Wednesday at 3:00 in F325. The primary goal of the position is the promotion of Honors Society meetings and events. The P.R. Officer is responsible for submitting weekly

discussion topics to the Harbinger as well as to the Harper Vision staff. We would also like the P.R. Officer to represent the Society at club "roundtables" and other workshops.

All those who haven't given the club a try, please do so. Each week we discuss a lively topic and the more the merrier. If you can't make our meeting time, you are still welcome to join us at our club parties and outings. Please pay attention to

notices in the Challenger for upcoming events. I would like to extend my best wishes to all of you and your families during this holiday season!

President's corner



The Environmental Expo last spring was a highlight of the year at Harper. Co-sponsored by the Honors Society and Phi Theta Kappa, the two organizations planned and executed Harper's second annual environmental conference. The first was sponsored by the horticultural organization. Each year, attendance and enthusiasm by both public and students has increased.

The keynote speaker last year, Wendy Paulsen of the local Citizens for Conservation and a mem-

ber of the National Board of the Nature Conservancy, explained how she got involved in environmental activism. Speaking throughout the afternoon, informing us what we can do to help save the earth, were representatives of Beyond the Beef, The Wild Onion Alliance (introducing us to our very own bio-region), Zero Population Growth, and professors Rex Burwell, Karen Lustig, Neil Shanker, and Jerry Stone. In addition, booths and exhibits were manned by dozens of organizations, including the

Audobon Society, the Body Shop, Citizens for Conservation, Coop America, Earth Place, the Sierra Club, and a local organic farmer.

I personally became involved because of my own commitment to our future on earth, just as I introduced and teach environmental ethics (Phil 170) as part of that commitment.

Dr. Jerome A. Stone
Department of Philosophy

To Eat or Not to Eat? That Is the Question

SARA: Wadd'ya wanna do?
 ELAINE: I dunno, wadd'ya wanna do?
 SARA: I dunno.
 ELAINE: Should we go eat?

Does this conversation sound familiar? Researchers have studied the process of decision making, but have not found the ultimate solution. How do we decide?

We encounter situations that require decisions every second of the day. Some may be as simple and thoughtless as "Should I go to the bathroom?" or as complex as "Should we buy this car?" Each different level of decision making requires a different procedure.

Researchers have found that decision making can be divided into two different branches, descriptive and normative. The two are sometimes diametrically opposed.

Descriptive decision making looks at the actual decisions people make. Researchers observe business people, blue collar workers, students, professionals—all of us—in action and analyze surveys.

Normative decision-making research is more a game of the mind. Theorists develop strategies for making decisions following rational choices. Normative research focuses on logic rather than individuals.

The two types of research show us the complexity of making a decision. We know

that quite often, logic plays no part in our decisions.

Elaine might ask, "Should we go eat?"—a question that involves simple logic. Is she hungry? If so, then it is time to eat. However, what if she also has a paper due in two hours? Now another factor complicates her decision-making process.

There are two popular decision making procedures which might be used to make this decision. One, cost-benefit analysis, originates in the field of economics, while the other, the value rating system, is a quantitative procedure which has been developed for non-monetary decisions.

Cost-benefit analysis revolves around a concept which economists call opportunity cost. For every decision we make, there is a cost and a benefit. The final decision is made by comparing the costs and benefits and determining which are worth more. The key is quantifying the cost of the lost opportunity and comparing it with the value of the gained opportunity. Elaine must weigh the costs of both outcomes. If she goes to dinner, her paper will not be finished on time, but if she finishes the paper she will go hungry. Now, individual preferences play a role. Elaine must decide if dinner is more important than the paper.

AS WE SEE IT

If the cost of dinner, not finishing the paper, is less than the cost of completing the paper, going hungry, Elaine will not eat.

The applicability to economics, where costs are very quantifiable, is obvious. When making a decision, simply weigh the dollar costs and decide. However, this process is also applicable to non-monetary situations, although it is not quite as easy to use.

A second model, the value rating model, quantifies your decisions for non-monetary situations. This model is most applicable for complex decisions because it is time consuming and detailed. In this model, the person articulates the criteria the decision is based on and the different options.

Although not a complex decision, Elaine could apply the value rating model to her dinner dilemma. She may decide her criteria for decision would be health maintenance, grades, intellectual activity, and friendships. She could make a table to reflect these and her possible choices (figure 1). Elaine would

then assign a value evaluating the importance, 1, 2 or 3—3 being the most important—to each of her criteria. She would then rate the possible choices again 1, 2 or 3—3 being the highest—on each criteria. A final value is obtained by multiplying the rating by the criteria's importance and adding all the values for the choice. Whichever choice has more points, wins.

decision making.

After Elaine makes the correct choice from the numerical information, she is left to evaluate her pleasure with the decision. If the choice is not what she wants, she is still free to change her mind. If Elaine is uncomfortable with going against the numbers she should go back and change the numbers to better fit her feelings and reevalu-

CRITERIA	IMPORTANCE	EAT DINNER		WRITE PAPER	
		RATING	TOTAL VALUE	RATING	TOTAL VALUE
HEALTH MAINTENANCE	3	3	9	0	0
GRADES	2	0	0	3	6
INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITY	2	1	2	3	6
FRIENDSHIP	2	2	4	0	6
TOTAL			15		12

Figure 1: Value rating method used to make a decision about dinner.

These models attempt to bridge the chasm between descriptive and normative branches. Both reduce decisions to impersonal final decisions while relying on the logical assignment of values, either monetary or objective, to subjective situations. Both methods, in order to make them more user-friendly, include the more human element of

ate. Is this contrived? Probably. Should she make a decision she does not like? NO.

Decision making is not a science, but an art. However, these methods make the art easier to create. Time for dinner yet? It's your choice.

The discussion is open and free-wheeling, exploring comparisons between the two stories, historical and cultural contexts, and personal responses to the selections, paralleling the three main goals Davis has for the course.

She wants the students to have a historical perspective of the experience of women as characters in and writers of literature. "There's a history here that must be understood before we can appreciate where women have come from, where we're going." Her goal is to expose students to the vast variety of literature written by women so they can appreciate the "richness, language, experimentation, different point-of-view of female authors."

Second, she expects them to come to terms with similarities in the characters, themes and situations of the selections from different eras. "Perspective is the key to understanding anything," says Davis. "The students should develop empathy, be able to relate in some way to every character they read about. This doesn't mean that read-

ers have to like every character—there's a difference"

Finally, the students should find some means of self-expression, relating their own lives to the material they are reading. For the class project, some students are interviewing their mothers about their experiences, or working on a collaborative video.

"I enjoy the intellectual stimulation in dissecting the literature we read with a group of fellow students who are as absorbed with learning and understanding as I am."

— Susan Jeronimus

The students are very enthusiastic about the class. Saba Baig is enjoying every minute of the class, which "really helps you understand the writers, their works, their values and opinions, and how women were and are treated in society."

"Everyone contributes to the

discussion," says Baig. "It's amazing to see that students relate their personal life events to the books read."

"The group is very close," says Davis. "They go beyond a formal class. The feeling is more of a seminar." Meeting in the cafeteria has helped create this atmosphere which has developed over the semester.

Clearly the structure of the class encourages interaction between the students. "I've formed a camaraderie with classmates, due to the format, which just doesn't happen in other classes," says Lucy Halverson.

Setting the right tone was one of the biggest challenges in setting up the class. The students were excited by the class, but worried that they might be required to become feminists. "That's a very misunderstood term," says Davis. "I want the students to understand enough history to see a need to thank feminists. As a teacher, I want to present the issues and let the students explore them on their own terms."

Davis is characterized by her students as a humorous and intelligent instructor who brings a lot to the class. The students are dedicated and hard working, willing to put the time necessary on the rigorous, twelve-book-long reading list. Davis thinks her students are wonderful. "They are bright, motivated, insightful, and open. They are very good at making connections, which is the basis of studying any literature. And, they are a lot of fun."

Joie Kallison loves the class, even though it's not what she expected. "Although we focus on analyzing the readings, the class enables us to learn about life."

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EDITORIAL POLICY

The Challenger is the voice of the Harper College Honors Society. We welcome articles, ideas and letters of interest appropriate for our members. We encourage contributions. Final editorial judgment is the sole responsibility of the editorial staff. For information on possible submissions, call x 2581. Written material should be placed in the Challenger box in the Journalism office, A379.

Stranger in a Strange Land

A Male's View of Lit 224

I decided to enrol in Women in Literature because my first honors course in astronomy was an exciting learning experience.

I had always enjoyed reading novels but recently had read nothing but textbooks. I had not read many novels written by women, so I felt as though I was missing an important aspect of literature.

Reaction to my decision to take the class was mixed. The fact that I was taking another honors course was not shocking to most people, but the fact that I was a male taking a women in literature course became an interesting topic of discussion.

Well, I approached this class with an open mind. Being one of only two males, I was in the minority; however, I was not intimidated as others expected I might be.

Twelve weeks through the course, I have nothing but good things to say. I could directly relate to many pieces of literature. Odd? Not really. I found that many of the characters in the novels mirrored people that I have known, both male and female. I found that you can learn a great deal from studying the insights of another gender. Most important, I found that there is really more in common between genders than most people realize.

The other students in the course are very open-minded and willing to learn. I believe that an honors course attracts this kind of student, and that this is the reason that honors courses are so successful.

—Tim Davis

Hull, continued from page 2

have fully decided where they stand on an issue and are open to changing their minds. In debate, a somewhat more formal concept, the debaters have (ideally) researched the relevant facts and taken a stand on a subject, and they are prepared to answer what they perceive as their opponents' strongest arguments, while marshaling evidence to support their own position.

There are times, it seems to me, when both of these skills are useful and appropriate. Public debates on issues such as the one on the North American Free Trade Agreement between Vice President Al Gore and multi-billionaire and former presidential candidate H. Ross Perot can be helpful to those of us who are instinctively wary of any paid commercial advertising, whether it's sponsored by a union or environmentalist group or by a business coalition. Presumably Mr. Gore and Mr. Perot have their own political strategy reasons for their stances, but the debate forum is an ideal way for listeners to balance and discount these motives and weigh the evidence both men present.

But aside from formal debate, sometimes people may be reluctant to discuss an issue because they sense that others might be prepared to debate, while they are really still exploring the issue and are not yet ready to take a stand. People can sometimes get into trouble by beginning to debate when discussion might prove more

productive and more educational for everyone involved. Moreover, a formal debate usually results in a winner and a loser, or perhaps two losers if it is a standoff, whereas a true discussion can yield all winners, in that everyone may learn something.

This is why we call our weekly Honors Society meetings "discussions," although perhaps "conversation" is a more honest label if we must have a label, because we make no promise to stay on the announced topic if something more interesting comes along. We realize that we cannot solve the world's problems by talking about them for an hour or two, but we can begin to understand why an intelligent person might hold a different opinion from our own.

This semester we are meeting in F-325 at 3:00 p.m. on Wednesdays and the topics are posted on my office door, F334B. All Honors people (both students and faculty) are welcome and may always bring guests.

Meanwhile, if the distinction between discussion and debate interests you and if you have time over the break for a book to read for personal satisfaction, I recommend *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* by Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton (2nd ed. 1991, Penguin). It's a relatively short book, easy to grasp, that is being discussed by people in business, education, and government, for its ideas on negotiating and consensus building, certainly useful skills for Honors students to acquire.

Elizabeth Anne Hull

'Tis The Season To Get Involved!

As usual, the Honors Society got into the holiday season with some traditional festivities of their own. The annual end of the semester pot-luck party was a success with all its fun and Christmas cheer. But the season isn't over yet! Keep your spirits soaring by attending the annual outing to Second City comedy club on January 15th. If you are interested please contact Shabana Jameel or Dr. Hull for further information. Due to limited space reservations must be made 3 days in advance so please R.S.V.P. as soon as possible.

Along with the new year came some new changes in the Honors Society. Weekly meetings will now be held at 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday in F325. Also, due to the chaos during the first week of school there will be no meeting on January 26th. Make a New Year's resolution that counts—stop by a Honors Society meeting and get involved today!

Date: Jan. 15th

Place: Second City

Location: In the Continental Towers on Golf Rd.
(2 miles East of Woodfield Mall)

Cost: \$10/ person

Show Time: 8 p.m.

* For information and R.S.V.P. contact Shabana Jameel
490- 1282

Directory Updates:

Welcome New Honors Program/Honors Society Members:

Asma Ali
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Hoffman Estates, IL 60194
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Katie Elmer
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Puni Kalra
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Lauretta O'Shea
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Schaumburg, IL 60193
708 351 3404

Andrea Ryant
(address and phone number unpublished by student's request)

Leslie Tucker
1530 W. Dempster #108
Mount Prospect, IL 60056
708 952-0850

And a special welcome back to a former Challenger editor:

Mike SeEVERS
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Arlington Heights, IL 60056
708 392-2846

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